

AN
ATTENDANCE ON PUBLIC ORDINANCES
NOT TO INFRINGE ON THE
DUTIES OF THE FAMILY AND THE CLOSET,
CONSIDERED IN A

SERMON,

FROM I COR. XIV. 40.

PREACHED OCTOBER 5, 1797.

AT A
MONTHLY MEETING

IN THE

REV. JOHN REYNOLDS'S

PLACE OF WORSHIP, CAMOMILE-STREET.

By JOSEPH BARBER.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE MINISTERS AND
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ATTENDANCE ON PUBLIC MEETINGS

AND TO THE

COMMITTEE OF THE AMERICAN

CONGRESS

SERMON

BY JOHN L. COR. JR.

PREACHED OCTOBER 3, 1857

AND

MONTHLY MEETING

IN THE

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C. B. BENTLEY, 10, N. B. STREET, AND

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WHEN this Sermon was delivered at the monthly meeting, the Preacher had no thought of its being made more public than from the pulpit; but when the ministers and people who heard it were pleased to express their approbation by desiring that it might be printed, this induced him to hope that some good effect had been already produced, and that it might be rendered still more beneficial if published. With this hope he sent it to the press, and if the Lord shall so far bless the publication, that it may be the means of promoting the spirit of religion among professors, and of leading them to a good plan of conduct, the Author's great end will be answered.

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A

S E R M O N.

I COR. XIV. 40.

LET ALL THINGS BE DONE DECENTLY,
AND IN ORDER.

THESE words contain an excellent rule for our *general conduct*. Let all things be done *decently*, in an agreeable and becoming manner; and in *order*, in a regular method, every thing in its proper time and place, so as to prevent confusion*.

* *Ευσχημόνως*, composite, decenter, honestly. *Κατατάξιν*. It is sometimes taken strictly in opposition to confusion, and so it is a distinct thing from decency. *Militare vocabulum et denotat cohortem militum instructam et ordine apto conglobatam.*—*Critica Sacra*, Leigh.

B

If

If men would observe this rule in their civil affairs, they would find considerable advantage by it; for upon forming a good plan and strictly observing it, they would dispatch their business more expeditiously as well as more comfortably. Some persons for want of a good method, appear to be always busy, yea almost continually in a hurry, yet bring little to pass; whereas those who carry on business in an orderly way, seldom appear to be in a hurry, yet accomplish a great deal. The minds of these persons are calm, and by attending to every part of their business, in its proper time and place, all goes on smoothly; whilst their minds who observe no order, are embarrassed with a crowd of cares at once.

If we apply this rule to our domestic concerns, and practise upon it, we shall find that it contributes much to our own benefit and comfort, and that of our families.

Observing

Observing this rule, we shall have our stated times for religious duties, in the family and in the closet, as also for our worldly business and concerns, and by keeping every duty in its proper place, all goes on pleasantly ; but if we observe no rule, or are continually breaking our rule, then one duty jostles out another, and the good of the family, as well as our own comfort, is much impaired thereby. We ought to take care, that we do not devote that time to indolence, or to pleasure and amusement, which should be spent in the *business* of our secular calling ; for if business be neglected, it is not only sinful in itself, but in its tendency is ruinous to our circumstances. As Solomon says, “ the soul
 “ of the sluggard desireth and hath no-
 “ thing,” *Prov.* xiii. 4. and he does not speak much better of the man of pleasure, chap. xxi. 17. “ He that loveth pleasure
 “ shall be a poor man, and he that loveth
 “ wine and oil shall not be rich.” Then

as to *religion*, if we suffer our worldly business or company to inroach upon the time which should be spent in religious duties, or if we spend that time from home which ought to be spent in those exercises; alas! what are we doing? We are wronging our own souls, and the souls of our domestics. What must our children and servants think of our religion, if they perceive that we do frequently make it truckle to the world, or to company, or to pleasure; or that we can neglect or practise it, just as suits existing circumstances? Will they not be tempted to think, that there is no reality in it? And are they not in danger of being greatly hurt, as to their best interest, by our disorderly conduct? and it is well, if their souls are not ruined.

By consulting the context it will appear, that the words of the text have a primary reference to the public worship of God, that it may be performed in a decent and orderly

orderly way : and as the subject we are now to consider, relates to an orderly method of conducting our religious exercises, in public and private, that one duty may not interfere with another, I presume it will be thought, the text is not improperly chosen, but furnishes us with an excellent maxim*.

The

* This passage of Scripture is no warrant for any to introduce into the worship of God, ceremonies of human invention, in order to make it more beautiful than Jesus Christ and his Apostles have left it. The worship under the Mosaic Dispensation, was attended with a great deal of outward pomp and ceremony, but as an Apostle says, these were *carnal ordinances* imposed on the people, until the time of reformation. God designed to bring his church to a more spiritual state of worship, which he has done by the Gospel Dispensation ; and now the beauty of divine worship consists in its simplicity and spirituality, and all attempts to adorn it, by the addition of human ceremonies, do but hide and tarnish its real glory, and carry in them a reflection upon our divine Master himself, as if he had given us a plan of worship not sufficiently perfect, but which

The subject, as expressed in the printed list, is *an attendance on public ordinances not to infringe on the duties of the family and the closet.*

Here it is supposed or taken for granted, that religion is to be attended to in our families, and closets, and public assemblies; and that we should endeavour to form such a plan and execute it, that all may be conducted so, as will best promote the great

might be mended by our additions. My sentiments quite accord with arch-bishop Leighton's, when he says, "the glory of the church of God consists not in stately buildings of temples, and rich furniture and pompous ceremonies; these agree not with its spiritual nature. Its true and genuine beauty is to grow in spirituality, and so to be liker itself, and have more of the presence of God, and his glory filling it as a cloud. And it hath been observed, that the more the church grew in outward riches and state, the less she grew, or rather the more sensibly she abated in spiritual excellencies."—Leighton's Commentary on 1st Epist. of Peter, ii. 4, 5

design

design of religion, which is the honour of God, the welfare of our own souls, and of those with whom we are particularly connected.

Here then I shall, First, speak of the necessity and importance of religion in the family, religion in the closet, and religion in the sanctuary of God.

Secondly, Endeavour to show, what is the best method of carrying on the whole to advantage.

I begin with *the necessity and importance of religion in the Family*. Now that it is the duty of all, who are placed at the head of families, to endeavour to promote the fear of God, and the spiritual interest of their domestics, may be demonstrated from various considerations.

If we only advert to the light of nature, or the reason which is in man, this will teach us, that they who have families ought to take care to provide for their sustenance, and to preserve them in health, safety and comfort. Agreeable to which the Scripture declares, “ If any provide not for his own, “ especially for those of his own house, “ he hath denied the faith, and is worse “ than an infidel.” 1 *Tim.* v. 8. But what! is our concern and attention to be confined to the present life, and their temporal interest? Ought it not to be extended to their souls and their everlasting salvation? Their souls are of much greater value than their bodies, yea of greater worth than all the world. The soul is the man. This is the jewel, the body is but the casket: This is the inhabitant, the body is but the tent. The soul is immortal, which gives it a vast weight and importance, but the body must shortly die. Therefore heads of families, considering that they have precious souls

com-

committed to their care, should have a special concern about them. If men would but calmly and impartially consider this matter, we might safely appeal to the tribunal of reason; but turning our thoughts to God's revelation, there we have the most satisfactory evidence of his mind and will, in this case. Family religion is recommended to us, both by precept and example. For the present I shall only produce two texts of Scripture; one is *Prov.* xxii. 6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The other is *Eph.* vi. 4. "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

It is not a new observation, but in my opinion deserves attention, that masters of families should be Prophets, Priests, and Kings, in their own houses. Prophets to instruct

instruct their families in the knowledge of God ; Priests to offer up spiritual sacrifices with them and for them ; and Kings to rule and govern them.

As to instruction, see how that is urged upon us respecting our children, in *Deut.* xi. 19. " Ye shall teach them your children," that is, teach your children the words of the Lord, " speaking of them, " when thou sittest in thy house, and when " thou walkest by the way, when thou " liest down, and when thou risest up." Family-instruction is an important part of family-religion, and for this purpose there should be reading God's holy word in the family, and catechising of children and servants. The Bible is the store-house of heavenly wisdom, and if we would have our children and servants acquainted with their duty to God and man, and be wise unto salvation, we should read to them, and cause them to read,

read, that blessed book the Bible, and endeavour to instruct them in the knowledge thereof. It was Timothy's happiness, that " From a child he had known the holy " scriptures, which were able to make him " wise unto salvation, through faith which " is in Christ Jesus." 2 *Tim.* iii. 15. This was owing, we have reason to believe, unto the pious care and good instruction of his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, or of one of them at least. See 2 *Tim.* i. 5. Besides reading the Scripture and other good books, which may help us to understand it, catechising children and servants at certain times, is a very likely means of doing good to their souls. This indeed is an excellent way of conveying instruction to the minds of young people, because it brings the principles of religion close to their understanding, naturally fixes their attention upon them, and is more likely to enlighten and impress them than large continued discourses. We are at no loss for cate-

catechisms, because, besides Dr. Watts's for young children, we have the Assembly's Catechism, which is a most excellent compendium of the Christian religion. Many ministers have done much good by catechising, and many heads of families have been blessed in the same way. Since this mode of instruction has been in a great measure laid aside, the interest of vital godliness has been losing ground. This is a matter, which deserves the serious consideration of ministers, as well as of professors in a private station.

We observed before, that as the master of a family should be a prophet to instruct his family in the good knowledge of the Lord, so he should be a *Priest*, to offer up the daily sacrifices of prayer and praise unto the God of heaven and earth. It is He that setteth the solitary in families, upon him we depend for family mercies, and to him we are indebted for all we enjoy.

And

And shall we then make him no acknowledgments in our families? Surely this must be very ungrateful to our Great Benefactor, as well as very injurious to our own souls, and the souls of our domestics. Heads of families should daily lead them to the Throne of Grace, and by praying with them, and for them, endeavour to teach them how to pray for themselves. Their adorations of God, their confessions of sin, their petitions for mercies, together with their thanksgivings and intercessions, may not only be pleasing and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, but may be of much service to their families, by instructing them in the duty of prayer, and quickening them to it under a divine influence. Dr. Doddridge, in his address to the master of a family, on the important subject of family religion, after introducing that passage of Scripture, *Jer. x. 25.* " Pour out thy
 " fury upon the heathen that know thee
 " not, and upon the families that call
 " not

“ not upon thy name :” thus speaks to
 the master of a family. “ I appeal to you
 “ as a man of ordinary sense and under-
 “ standing, to judge whether this does not
 “ strongly imply, that it may be taken for
 “ granted, every family, which is not an
 “ heathen family, which is not quite ig-
 “ norant of the living and true God, will
 “ call upon his name. Well then may it
 “ pain my heart to think, that there
 “ should be a professedly Christian family,
 “ whom this dreadful character suits.”
 Moreover, the master of a family should
 be *a king* in his own house, to govern it in
 the fear of God. He should have good
 orders and rules in his house, and use his
 authority to have them observed. “ I
 “ know Abraham,” says God, “ that he
 “ will command his children and his
 “ household after him, and they shall keep
 “ the way of the Lord, to do justice and
 “ judgment, that the Lord may bring
 “ upon Abraham that which he hath
 “ spoken

“ spoken of him,” *Gen.* xviii. 19. This family-rule should not be severe and tyrannical, but mild and gentle, calculated to conciliate the esteem of our dependents, and should never go into rigorous measures, except in cases of necessity.

I cannot forbear adding, that all endeavours for promoting family-religion should be enforced by a good example, without which I fear all will come to nothing, and perhaps worse than nothing. It is commonly and truly said, that example is better than precept: it is the most striking way of conveying instruction, and likely to be most successful. However this is best of all, for these two to go together. We should let our children and servants see, that we are in earnest about religion; that whilst we recommend it to them, we really practise it ourselves. That as we caution them against sin, against all manner of sin, so we are careful

ful to avoid and abstain from it ourselves ; and that when we urge upon them the necessity and importance of minding the things of their peace, we say nothing more than what we seriously attend to ourselves. In short, masters of families should be able to say to them, “ come follow me, “ and I will lead you the way to heaven.”

I proceed now to speak of the necessity and importance of *religion in the closet*. For this we have our Lord’s injunction, *Matt. vi. 6.* “ But thou, when thou “ prayest, enter into thy closet, and when “ thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy “ Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward “ thee openly.” Certainly it could not be our Lord’s meaning, that we should never pray except in our closets ; no, but that we should not be like the Pharisees, who loved to be seen praying in the streets and in the synagogue. “ Don’t imitate them,”
says

says he, " but make conscience of secret
 " prayer, and let it be secret, out of the
 " sight or hearing of your fellow mortals."
 If we habitually neglect secret prayer, it
 is a sign that our souls are alienated from
 the life of God, and that we have no just
 claim to him as our God. We may be
 induced to attend public worship, and even
 family-worship at times, from worldly
 motives ; yet all this is no better than hy-
 pocrify, when religion is neglected in the
 closet. What evidence can we have of
 our having the love of God in us, if we
 shun his company, and never wish to con-
 verse with him alone? He is the best friend
 we have in the world ; we receive our
 all from his bounty, and depend upon
 him continually for a supply of all our
 wants. And what! have we nothing to
 say to him in secret? No thanksgivings
 to offer to him for mercies received? No
 petitions for mercies wanted? No con-
 C " fessions

essions of sin? No humiliations, that we have not rendered to him according to the benefits done to us? Sure I am, if we have religion at heart, we cannot live in the neglect of secret prayer. There may be the outside of religion without it, but there cannot be the inside, the vital part thereof.

This duty comes recommended to us by the example of holy men. We read in Scripture of *Abraham*, *Gen.* xxi. 33, "That he planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God." This might serve both for his private and family-devotions. We are told of *Isaac*, "that he went out into the field to meditate, or pray (as in the margin) at eventide," *Gen.* xxiv. 63. And it is recorded of *Jacob*, "that he wrestled all night with God in prayer," *Ch.* xxxii. 24. I could mention others out of the Old Testament, and if we turn
to

to the New, we shall find examples there of the same practice. For instance, it is said of *Cornelius*, " that he was a devout
 " man, and one that feared God with all his
 " house, that he gave much alms to the people,
 " and prayed to God alway," *Acts* x. 2.
 What an excellent character of this soldier!
 He was an eminently godly and charitable
 man, and his praying to God always, may
 denote his praying in his family and his
 closet too; as also his constancy and per-
 severance in those exercises. It is quite to
 my purpose to remark, that when this *Cor-
 nelius* sent for the apostle Peter, as he was
 directed to do by an angel of the Lord, the
 messengers which were sent found him at
 his secret devotions on the house-top; as
 we read in that chapter. I think there
 can be no room to doubt, that this hath
 been the practice of the saints of God in
 all ages, and therefore I will not look
 after more examples, but only mention

that of *our blessed Lord himself*. As one* observes, “ he prayed with his disciples, “ that from him we might learn to pray “ in our several families ; and he prayed “ apart from them, that we might also “ learn to pray in secret. We read of his “ being all night in prayer. How can “ we think of this example, of one whom “ we call our Lord and Master, and not “ be powerfully moved and affected by “ it ? How can we think of the Son of “ God wrestling with his Father in secret, “ and not resolve to imitate him ?” As this practice is recommended by precept, and also by example, so it deserves our regard, from its being an excellent privilege, and on account of the great advantage to be derived from it. Our condescending God allows us to tell him all that is in our hearts ; to spread all our sins, all our wants, all our fears and distresses before

* Rev. Henry Grove.

him,

him, and to call upon him for every good thing, with an humble hope and confidence, that whatever we ask in the name of Christ, agreeable to the will of God, it shall be done for us. What a comfort is it, when we can go to God, as a friend and father in Jesus Christ, and unbosom ourselves before him? He invites us to come, and cast all our cares and burdens upon him; and when we are helped to do this, it is a prodigious relief unto us. We go to the Throne with an heavy heart, as Hannah did, but having poured out our souls before Him, we come away joyful. Secret prayer is a precious means of holding communion with God, and therefore it is of excellent use for nourishing our graces, for increasing our comforts, and for promoting our meetness for heaven. Along with secret prayer there should be reading God's holy word, meditation upon it, and sometimes self-examination. But of these I shall not now speak particularly.

I come now to speak of *religion in the sanctuary*. Although we ought carefully to avoid all vain ostentation in our religion, and do nothing to be seen of men, yet we must not be ashamed of religion, but openly espouse and practise it in the sight of men. They are weighty words of our divine Master upon this subject, *Mark viii. 38.* “ Whosoever shall be ashamed of me
 “ and of my words in this adulterous and
 “ sinful generation, of him also shall the
 “ Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh
 “ in the glory of the Father with his holy
 “ angels.”

Whilst many in the present day neglect religion, and others despise it, we ought to express a zealous regard for it, and not be deterred by the frowns and scoffs of any, if we mean to have the approbation of our heavenly Judge. It was the duty of the Lord's people formerly to make a public profession of their attachment to the true
 God,

God, and to meet together for his worship, and it is as much incumbent on them now. Sion was the place where God had his house, and where his people assembled together for his worship; and therefore of this Sion it is said, "the Lord loveth the gates of Sion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." *Pf. lxxxvii. 2.* It is evidently implied, that God loved the dwellings of Jacob, where his name was called upon in truth, yet it is declared, that he loved the gates of Sion more. And why so? The reason is obvious, because he was more honoured by being publicly worshipped, and because this was the most likely means of spreading the knowledge of his glory, and of winning souls unto him.

Under the present dispensation of the Gospel, there is no particular house for God of his appointment, such as the tabernacle and temple formerly were, but

we may pray any where, worship any where, as best suits our convenience or present circumstances. Nevertheless it is as much the duty of the Lord's people, to have their assemblies for public worship, as it was formerly. Can it be thought, that we are less obliged to seek the honour of God, the spiritual welfare of our fellow men, and the good of our own souls, than they were in former times. We find that in the apostles days, Christians were formed into churches or religious societies, for the purposes of carrying on the worship of God, and their mutual edification, and they had their meetings for these ends. Their stated meetings on the Lord's-day, or the first day of the week; as appears from *Acts* xx. vii. " And upon the first
 " day of the week, when the disciples
 " came together to break bread, Paul
 " preached unto them ready to depart on
 " the morrow, and continued his speech
 " until midnight." And *1 Cor.* xvi. 2 :
 " Upon

“ Upon the first day of the week, let
 “ every one lay by him in store as God
 “ hath prospered him, that there be no
 “ gatherings when I come.” We have
 likewise scripture authority for believing
 that they had their meetings for prayer
 and religious improvement at other times,
 as occasion did require. An instance of
 this sort is recorded in *Acts* xii. Peter
 being in prison, there was a meeting for
 prayer, in the house of Mary, the mother
 of John Mark, and many were gathered
 together. And behold the success of their
 prayers! Whilst they were praying, the
 Lord sent his angel to deliver his servant
 from his imprisonment. The promise of
 Christ is wonderfully adapted for our en-
 couragement, *Matt.* xviii. 19, 20. “ If
 “ two of you shall agree on earth, as
 “ touching any thing they shall ask, it
 “ shall be done for them of my Father
 “ which is in Heaven; for where two or
 “ three

“ three are gathered together in my name,
 “ there am I in the midst of them.”

Let it be further considered, that Christians are exhorted and commanded, “ not
 “ to forsake the assembling of themselves
 “ together as the manner of some is, but ex-
 “ hort one another daily.” *Heb. x. 25.* In
 persecuting times, they were tempted to
 forsake the assembling of themselves toge-
 ther for fear of suffering. Some were
 overcome by the temptation, yet there were
 other faithful souls, who encountered great
 difficulties and dangers to meet together
 for God’s worship, and their mutual edi-
 fication. It might be said, they sought
 the bread of their souls at the peril of
 their lives. In the present day, our danger
 is not from this quarter; no, blessed be
 God, we can meet together for worship
 whenever we please, under the protection
 of law, none daring to disturb us. But
 our danger arises from our love of ease
 and

and sensual indulgence, from our lukewarmness in religion, and from the evil example and apostacy of some professors. O! take heed, brethren, of losing your first love; of waxing cold in religion, and of turning back from the good ways of the Lord. Don't forget that awful word, "if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." Apostacy begins in the heart, in an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. It manifests its prevalence in drawing persons to neglect the duties of religion in the closet and the family, and then it proceeds to a forsaking the assemblies of the Lord's professing people. When persons, who once made a profession, come this length, that they will neglect public ordinances, and pay no regard to the sanctification of the sabbath, but will spend it in idleness, in dissipation and pleasure, or worldly business, it may be said they are gone a great way from God, and (what-ever

ever they may think) are in a most dangerous condition. I will not say there is no hope of them or for them; no, because backsliders have been recovered and healed, and we know not what a God of sovereign grace and mercy may do. But this we affirm, that at present they are in an awful condition. They have no pleasure in God or his service, and he has said, that his soul hath no pleasure in them. They are bidding him depart from them; because they desire not the knowledge of his ways; and what can they expect, but that he should say unto them, "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?" But I would willingly hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, although I thus speak.

I come now to the last thing I proposed, viz. To consider, How we are to attend on public ordinances, so as not to infringe

infringe on the duties of the family and the closet.

I feel myself rather at a loss here, because we have no particular directions in the sacred word concerning this matter; nothing but general rules which we are to apply in the best manner we can. I would, therefore, speak with caution, and not in a peremptory manner; yet being called to it, I will give you my opinion freely without reserve.

Let us consider this matter a little, both in respect to working-days and sabbaths. You know that on working-days we have lectures, church-meetings, and prayer-meetings; an attendance on some of these may be your duty, and for your spiritual profit, when you can do it without neglecting any other duty.

Pro-

Providence has so ordered it, that some persons have leifure, and are in easy circumstances ; infomuch that they can attend this or that lecture, without hurting the temporal intereft of themselves or families. In this cafe it appears to be right to give their attendance, that they may get good to their fouls. But we don't fay, that it is the duty of persons to attend fuch lectures, when they have neceffary bufinefs to mind, and families to provide for ; no, they ought not to neglect their bufinefs and the care of their families.

I will fpeak a word or two about church-meetings. It muft be allowed, that it is not *always* the duty of church-members to attend thefe ; yet I fear not to fay, that it is the duty of all to make a point of attending with the church they belong to, whenever they can. The command, “ not to
“ forfake the afsembling of ourfelves together,”

“ ther,” appears to me to apply to this case and to be binding upon us. When church-meetings are appointed for prayer, exhortation, or any other matter for the benefit of the church, it is a discouragement to pastors to see some of their flock careless and indifferent about attending; this conduct is also slighting the church, setting a bad example to others, and must be injurious to their own souls. It is to be lamented that many professors of the present day have lost sight of this part of their duty, so as to make no conscience of attending their church-meetings. Does not this manifest a great want of love and zeal? Where is your love to the body of which you are a member, and your zeal for its prosperity? It has been the happy experience of many, who have conscientiously attended these meetings, that they have frequently been to them times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. And when it is considered that these meetings are only

once a week for an hour or two, and perhaps only once or twice in a month, if people were to contrive well, they might generally manage their affairs so as to give their attendance without infringing upon any other duty. To this I will add, that prayer-meetings have their advantages, when properly conducted: they serve to promote mutual love and edification; therefore when those who are concerned in them can attend, without neglecting any other necessary duty, it is certainly right to encourage them with their presence.

But now we shall turn our thoughts unto the Lord's day.

I conceive that the gentlemen, who formed the list of subjects for monthly discussion at the monthly meetings, had a special respect to the Lord's day in the subject under our consideration; and then the question is, what is the best way of spending the sabbath?

bath? Or thus, what is the best method we can take on that holy day, for our own improvement in religion, and for that of our families, if we are favoured with them?

It is taken for granted, that the day is to be kept holy, that it is to be devoted to the worship of God, and the concerns of our souls. It is a special season of grace, as a market day for the soul, therefore we should endeavour to make the best use of it we can possibly. I am sensible that people's situation and circumstances are so widely different, that no rule can be given which will suit all, but what may be best for some, will not be so for others. I wish all my dear hearers to be looking up to God for direction in a way of serious and fervent prayer; and then in the fear of God to consider, what is the best course they can take, which is the most likely to promote the glory of God, their own spiritual

D

improve-

improvement, and the good of those they are connected with.

In this great city, you have opportunities for attending the public worship of God; morning and afternoon; besides which there are evening-lectures, where the gospel of Christ is faithfully preached. I am glad there are such lectures, because I believe they have their important use. I view them as advantageous seasons for young people, whose lot is cast into families destitute of family-religion; for servants likewise in some situations who can but seldom, perhaps never, attend public worship, except in the evening; and no doubt, they may be convenient and beneficial to others besides these.

But now if you ask me, what is my judgment in respect to those who have the care of families, young children and servants? Is it best for them to attend these lectures? Without hesitation I answer, no, because I think

think I can show you a more excellent way. My opinion is, that if you attend public worship with your families morning and afternoon, you may improve the time in the evening to greater advantage at home, than by going abroad, spending some part of it in your closets, and the rest in your families in religious exercises, except what is necessary for the refreshment of your bodies.

I will take the liberty of pointing out to you a plan of conduct for the Lord's day evenings, which you may adopt unless you can think of a better.

I observe in the first place, that it is highly proper to devote more time on that day to closet religion than on other days. This certainly comports with the design of the sabbath, which is to be consecrated to God's service and the benefit of the soul. After having heard two sermons, I am inclined to think it will be more profitable to

meditate upon what you have been hearing, trying to get it impressed upon your hearts, than to hear more, and leave little or no time for reflection. Some are excessively fond of much hearing, and think but little on what they have heard. For want of meditation the word slippeth away, and has no durable effect upon them. Meditation is like digesting our food; for as the food we take does not nourish the body unless it be digested, no more does the word nourish the soul unless it be meditated upon. It is to be lamented that there is a great number of unprofitable hearers, "hearers of the word but not doers," who, as described by the apostle James, "are like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." James i. 23, 24. I would not be misunderstood, as if I meant to say, that all who are fond of much hearing are unprofitable hearers; no, by no means; for I am persuaded there

are many of them serious Christians, who love God's word and profit by it : yet as to these, I apprehend that if they heard less and thought more, it would be better for them. I repeat it, that in my judgment the best method for spiritual improvement is to hear only two sermons, and then in the evening in your secret retirement to recollect what you have been hearing, and labour to get your hearts more deeply affected with the truths which have been delivered. If these truths have been of an humbling nature, meditate on them for your humiliation ; if they have been encouraging and comforting, dwell on them in order that your souls may be strengthened and comforted by them.

In your secret prayers be longer and larger than common. Think of *your sins, your wants, and your mercies*, and these will furnish you with matter for prayer. Having time for it, make confession of your sins very particularly before the Lord : like-

wife spread your temporal and spiritual wants before him by mentioning them distinctly ; and return him thanks for his mercies, not in a common or general way, but call to remembrance his favours as well as you can, and thank him for this, and for that, and for the other, as they occur to your mind. It is our privilege, that in our closets we may be quite free with God, may say any thing to him in our own language, provided it be spoken with reverence and godly fear. He does not regard the language, he knows the meaning, and if it come from a sincere and humble heart in the name of Christ, he will mercifully attend to it.

Moreover it will be proper for you in your closets to read some portion of God's holy word, and endeavour to understand it and feel its power. Don't satisfy yourselves with bare reading as many do, but ask yourselves the same question as Philip put

put to the Ethiopian Eunuch, when he found him reading in the prophecy of Isaiah, “understandest thou what thou “readest?” *Acts* viii. 30. It is not reading much at a time, but reading with understanding, meditation and prayer, that is the most profitable way. If you have time for it, you may also read a printed sermon of some sound and pious minister, wherein some doctrine, duty, promise or privilege of the gospel is opened. This will enlarge your views of the subject, and bring to your remembrance such truths as you yourselves would not have immediately recollected.

I would farther observe, that when you retire for secret devotion, you will do well to put your children and servants upon retiring too, and recommend it to them to spend the time in praying to God, in reading his word or some good book, and in learning their catechism or hymns.

When

When you call your family together for worship, you may inquire of your children and servants, with mildness and tenderness, what they remember of the sermons they have been hearing. This practice will tend to make them attentive in hearing, and give you an opportunity of taking up some of those truths which have been delivered, and making such remarks upon them as by God's blessing may be useful unto them. After this hear them their catechism and hymns, and endeavour to instruct them in some part thereof. You may then call upon each of them, who are capable of it, to read a chapter in the Bible; afterwards read some good sermon, what is plain and easy to be understood, and then close the service of the day with singing and prayer to God.

Thus I have given you something of a plan for your conduct on Lord's day evenings, supposing you to have families under your

your care: yet you will observe, that I don't urge it upon you as a matter of necessity to adopt and follow this plan exactly, if you can make alterations which you apprehend will be better. I leave you to judge for yourselves: only judge in the fear of God, and with prayer for his direction, and impartially consider what is best for your own souls, and what is the most likely to promote the knowledge, spirit, and power of religion in your families.

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